UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/CN.5/1997/NGO/3
4 February 1997

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

COMMISSION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
Thirty-fifth session
25 February-6 March 1997
Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda*

FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: REVIEW OF RELEVANT UNITED NATIONS PLANS AND PROGRAMMES OF ACTION PERTAINING TO THE SITUATION OF SOCIAL GROUPS

Statement submitted by the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* * *

Preparations for the 1999 International Year of Older Persons

The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) has more than 30 million members over age 50, 50,000 of whom live in 152 countries throughout the world. AARP's motto is, To serve not to be served, which is fulfilled by the thousands of older volunteers who carry out AARP's programmes. AARP is a non-governmental organization in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council.

In 1995, our statement to the Commission for Social Development (E/CN.5/1995/NGO/2) commented on the conceptual framework and preparation and observance of the 1999 International Year of Older Persons. We also commented on our COALITION 99, as a communications vehicle for the Year. We are pleased to indicate that we currently have 457 organizations worldwide sharing

* E/CN.5/1997/1.

information on plans and programmes not only for 1999, but also for the 1 October International Day of Older Persons celebrations each year.

This year we would like to speak about the theme "Towards a society for all ages". We would like to call the Commission's attention to the fact that, although there are two generations that can be called "vulnerable and dependent", the very young and the very old, it is almost always only older people, and some of them not so old, who are described in this manner. We think this is a mistake, a stereotype that has to be overcome.

We wish to also direct the Commission's attention to the importance of the issue of what happens to the very young in terms of health care, nutrition, access to clean drinking water and so forth, and the clear impact that these factors have on them as they age. Therefore, if we are to honour the theme for the International Year, with respect to fostering a multigenerational society, then we must not segregate older persons but mainstream them. There is a clear need to look at people's life cycles in order to increase the possibility of a healthy and active old age. By doing so, all generations will benefit.

Societies around the world are ageing. The developing as well as the developed countries will experience the greying of their population. Organizations, including the United Nations, societies and Governments must find a way to utilize the resource that older persons represent, the knowledge that they can bring to bear in finding solutions to the challenges facing us all; but we must also look at how we can improve each generation's chances to achieve a healthy, active old age and we must begin by erasing the stereotype that describes older persons as "frail, dependent and vulnerable". Of course, this phrase can describe some people at all stages of the life cycle, but such a stereotype serves only to isolate not to integrate older persons into society.

AARP, in collaboration with the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat will shortly be embarking on a worldwide poster competition whose theme will be "Towards a society for all ages" and which is aimed at engaging peoples of all ages worldwide. This along with COALITION 99 is another commitment AARP is making to the 1999 International Year of Older Persons.

AARP requests the Commission for Social Development, in its preparations for the 1999 International Year of Older Persons, to uphold the theme "Towards a society for all ages", so as to foster a multigenerational society. The 1999 International Year of Older Persons will provide an opportunity to make a lasting difference in terms of how societies and individuals integrate their ageing populations.